

# Vacation Preparedness Tips

Summertime means vacation time for many people. Whether your plans will take you across the state or around the world, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) encourages people to include emergency preparedness in vacation planning.

While you may be familiar with disasters that are common in your community, you could encounter unfamiliar hazards on vacation. Identify the hazards for the area you plan to visit. The same response actions you use at home for a particular hazard may be challenging to implement in your vacation spot. For example, you may have a basement at home to take safe refuge in during a severe storm but that may not be available when you are on vacation. Know the emergency response plan for your hotel or other lodging accommodations.

A little research, planning and strategic packing could go a long way toward keeping your family safe throughout your vacation.

## **All Vacations**

- Develop a communication plan. Make sure each person you are traveling with has an up-to-date list of phone numbers and e-mail addresses for your established point-of-contact and for each member of your traveling group. Ensure your point-of-contact is not living in the area that you are visiting. You should select an individual that will not be impacted by the hazard event if it occurs.
- Pack a travel size emergency kit with water, snacks, a first-aid kit, flashlight, small battery operated radio, extra batteries and an emergency contact card with names and phone numbers. Pack extra supplies of critical items, such as prescription medications and baby formula.
- Know the county you are visiting or the counties that you will be traveling through. Hazardous weather warnings are issued by county.
- Inform family and friends of your travel plans and advise them of any changes during the course of your vacation.
- Bring along a travel weather radio which will automatically switch to the weather radio station closest to your travel area and will alert you to any hazardous weather.
- Check the weather forecast each day of your trip in order to be prepared for any predicted weather impacts in your travel area.
- If traveling internationally, register with the U.S. Department of State through a free online service at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/>. The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) allows travelers to enter information about upcoming trips abroad so that the Department of State can better assist them in an emergency.

- If you do encounter a disaster that affects your vacation and the communication systems, you should let your family know you are safe by utilizing the American Red Cross Safe and Well website at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) to register your status and that of others traveling in your group.

### **Coastal Vacations**

You may encounter hurricanes, tsunamis or severe storms as part of a vacation planned at a coastal area. Being prepared for these specific hazards could assist you and your family in staying safe throughout your vacation.

- Know the evacuation route from your vacation area. If possible, obtain a map of the evacuation routes from the emergency management office of the state that you are visiting. Evacuation routes are usually marked by signs. Learn to identify the signs when you arrive at your vacation area.
- Identify the location of emergency shelters in the event that you cannot evacuate.
- Be aware of secondary hazards from the main event, which could include inland flooding, tornadoes and/or storm surge.
- If you are unable to evacuate, stay away from all windows and exterior doors, seeking shelter in a bathroom. Bathtubs can provide some shelter if you cover yourself with plywood or other materials.

### **Camping Vacations**

If your summer vacation involves camping either in a tent or recreational vehicle (RV), you may encounter severe storms, tornadoes, wildfires or flash flooding.

- Map your location and if possible, identify the mile markers that are in close proximity to your location as this will help you and your family identify if a predicted tornado path is headed in your direction.
- Since warning sirens and other devices may not be available in remote camping areas, cell phone users can sign up for text message alerts from the Weather Channel in order to keep apprised of changing weather conditions.
- Contact the campground manager upon arrival and ask if there are any sturdy structures at the campground where you could seek shelter in the event of severe weather.
- Do not stay in your tent or RV if severe storms are impacting the area as the high winds may cause trees and other structures to topple onto your tent or RV.
- If heavy rains are expected in your area, do not camp in low-lying areas that may be prone to flash flooding. In addition, pay attention to weather forecasts upstream that may also cause flash flooding in your area.

## **Outdoor Activities**

Summertime draws individuals to the outdoors for various activities such as picnicking, hiking and boating among numerous others. Ensure you are aware of the types of hazards that may impact your activities based on your location.

- If you hear thunder, you are close enough to be struck by lightning, even if it's not raining. Move to a safe building if you hear thunder. If you cannot get to a safe building, get to a safe, hard-top vehicle. Roll up windows, close the doors and avoid all metal surfaces.
- If your plans include boating, don't go out if thunderstorms are in the forecast. If you're on the water and the skies are threatening, get to land and find a safe building or vehicle.
- Get personal watercraft off the water immediately at the first sign of threatening weather and get to a safe shelter.
- If you get caught in the open when lightning is threatening, do not seek shelter under trees. Lightning often hits the tallest object. You should get low to the ground, on the balls of your feet in a crouching position. The goal is to get as low as possible, while minimizing your contact with the ground.
- If a tornado warning is issued for your area, your only option for protection may be to retreat to a ditch or other low area, get as low to the ground as possible and cover your head from possible debris.
- Be aware of flash floods that may be occurring if you abandon your outdoor activities to head home. Most people underestimate the power of water. It only takes 18 – 24 inches of water to float most vehicles. Never attempt to drive through standing water.

## **Vacationing with Individuals with Functional Needs**

Being prepared for disasters or emergencies is critically important in today's ever changing environment. It is even more important for those with disabilities or those who may need assistance in the event of a disaster or emergency. Take extra precautions this summer when traveling with family members and friends who require assistance in responding to hazardous events.

- Ensure the individual you are traveling with has an Emergency Health Information Card. This card can provide information to first responders such as "I may have difficulty understanding what you are telling me" or "I am deaf or hard of hearing," etc. This will aid the first responders in assisting your traveling companion in the event you are separated by the hazardous situation.
- Pack sufficient medications and copies of prescriptions in the event you may need to get them refilled if you lose the supply you brought with you on the trip.

- Know the hazards in the area you will be visiting and have a plan specific to your needs in order to respond to the situation. For example, you may want to ensure you have a heavy pair of gloves to use while wheeling or making your way over glass and debris in the event of a severe storm or tornado.
- If you are staying at a hotel, make management aware of your needs in the event that you may have to evacuate the hotel.
- Visit the Ready Illinois website for additional Emergency Preparedness Tips that can be applied both at home and while on vacation. The link is: <http://www.ready.illinois.gov/before/specialneeds.htm>

### **Vacationing with your Pets**

Vacationing with your pets can be rewarding and entertaining for the entire family. It's like taking a little bit of home (the best part, actually) with you. Take the following precautions to ensure the safety of your pets during your vacation.

- Never let your pet off the leash in an unfamiliar area and especially during hazardous weather conditions. While a storm may not affect your pet at home, your travel location may not seem as secure to the pet and they may become agitated during storms especially if you are camping in a tent or RV.
- Ensure you have sufficient supplies of food and fresh water for your pet in case stores in the area suffer loss of operation due to hazardous weather.
- Ensure your pet has identification tags with your cell phone number and possibly a microchip in case you get separated from your pet due to the hazardous weather.
- Ensure you have a picture of your pet in case you have to identify them if you do get separated during hazardous weather.

### **Sources of Weather and Weather Safety Information**

- Your local Emergency Management Agency (EMA/ESDA)
- The state Emergency Management Agency where you are traveling
- Your local chapter of the American Red Cross (ARC) or [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)
- The nearest office of the National Weather Service (NWS) [www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov)
- National Weather Service Forecast Office websites in Illinois:
 

Davenport, IA	<a href="http://www.weather.gov/davenport">www.weather.gov/davenport</a>
Romeoville, IL	<a href="http://www.weather.gov/chicago">www.weather.gov/chicago</a>
Lincoln, IL	<a href="http://www.weather.gov/lincoln">www.weather.gov/lincoln</a>
St. Louis, MO	<a href="http://www.weather.gov/stlouis">www.weather.gov/stlouis</a>
Paducah, KY	<a href="http://www.weather.gov/paducah">www.weather.gov/paducah</a>
- State of Illinois [www.ready.illinois.gov](http://www.ready.illinois.gov)